

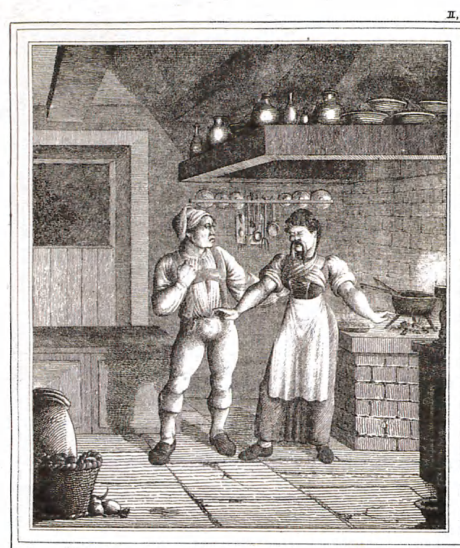
INTERIOR MOTIVES

Rosemarie Trockel's *Three Free Wishes*, 2013, presents three Acrystal casts of racks of ribs, all made from the same form and mounted in a row on a sheet of Perspex that bends outward from the wall on which the work hangs. The racks at right and center face concave side out, while the third rack, at left, shows its other, seemingly meatier side, as if to make plain the sculptural objects' origins in animal flesh and bone, and perhaps to suggest, by making visible all at once both front and back of the racks, that flesh and bone recast as sculptural meatiness is the only thing on offer in the artwork. At the same time, the Perspex support that mediates the casts' attachment to the wall insists on the artifice of the work as a whole, situating it in relation to both painting and sculpture as media of materialization. As is often the case with Trockel's art, *Three Free Wishes* also appears to allude to a literary work, in this case a fairy tale, "Three Wishes," which Trockel likely knows in the version first published by Johann Peter Hebel in 1808.

A peasant woman and her husband are visited in their modest cottage by a mountain fairy, who gives them three wishes; before departing, the fairy counsels the couple to take eight days to consider what to do with their wishes. Despite the pair's preoccupation with the risk of unintended wishing, the woman, aroused by the smell of potatoes frying in a pan on the hearth the very next evening, wastes a wish by giving voice to her desire for something more to share with her husband: "If only we had a sausage to go with those potatoes!" The husband, for his part, also speaks too soon, and directs his wishing words toward the organ with which his wife fatefully took in the aroma of frying potatoes: "If only the sausage had grown on your nose!" "Hardly was the last word spoken," writes Hebel, "than the sausage was sitting fast on the good wife's nose, as if it had grown there in the womb. It hung down at the sides like a Hussar's moustache." The tale comes to a close with the articulation and fulfillment of the third wish—the wish for the removal of the sausage from the woman's nose by means of the fairy's "barber services" conducted with her "invisible hand."¹

In his remarkable essay "On the Definition of Introjection" (1912), Sándor Ferenczi anticipates some of the major claims of Sigmund Freud's writings on narcissism and melancholia published a few years later. "In principle," asserts Ferenczi, "man can love only himself; if he loves an object he takes it into his ego." "Just like the poor fisherman's wife in the fairy tale," he

continues, "onto whose nose a curse made a sausage grow and who then felt any contact with the sausage as if it were her own skin, and had to protest violently against any suggestion of cutting off the unpleasant growth: so we feel all suffering



Drey Wünsche.

fig. 1: Josef Jakob Dambacher, "Drey Wünsche" (1842), in J. P. Hebel, *Die Schwanke des Rheinländischen Hausfreundes* (reprint; Mauritius-Verlag, Berlin, 1922).

caused to our loved object as our own."² I wrote above that *Three Free Wishes* appears to allude to a literary work. I might just as well have said that it provides the impetus for free associations to a literary work. *Three Free Wishes* provoked my associations with special force, as Trockel's title seemed to me not merely to take over a commonplace expression but to call up a story that also found its way into Ferenczi's attempt to define psychic introjection as an extension of the ego, in other words as a procedure not so much of incorporation as of transference, indeed as a form of mental activity foundational for any sort of representation at all. Ferenczi would have been familiar with Hebel's version of "Three Wishes," in addition to the Hungarian and perhaps other variants. His remarks alter some of the details—in Hebel, the woman is not a fisherman's wife (that would seem to conflate his fairy tale with the Grimms' "The Fisherman and His Wife") and she does not protest the removal of the sausage attached to her nose—but the gist of Hebel's tale comes across.

(opposite page, top)

TABLE 1, 2006

Glazed ceramic, steel, 53 × 122 × 62 cm

(opposite page, bottom)

TABLE 9, 2008

Glazed ceramic, steel, 38 × 135 × 45.5 cm

It is not the moral presented at the end of the story — “Every opportunity for happiness will be lost on one who lacks the understanding to make use of it”—that interests Ferenczi, but the stunning moment midway through, in which a sausage resembling a Hussar’s moustache becomes part of a woman’s face. If Ferenczi reenvisions Hebel’s “Three Wishes” as a figuration of psychic introjection in which a sausage stands for the extension of the ego’s self-affection and with that the very possibility of what we come to know as love, Trockel’s *Three Free Wishes* concretizes an association between wishes and the flesh from which they arise and in which they manifest themselves.

Allusions to psychoanalytic concepts have long played an important part in Trockel’s art, and her works often seem to be aiming to stimulate associations by means of both their formal play with media and genres and their relation to titles rich with weird imagery and wit. When I suggest that we should recognize affinities between Ferenczi’s 1912 text and Trockel’s *Three Free Wishes*, I do so knowing that the links might seem to be merely of my own making. This is fitting. Trockel’s art seeks to draw its viewers into a kind of postsurrealist engagement of unconscious psychic processes as modes of seeing, feeling, and thinking proper to aesthetic experience in both the production and the reception of artworks as such.

In fact it was not *Three Free Wishes* but *Paranoia*, 2013, and *Interior Motive*, 2013, that first got me thinking about Ferenczi’s writings, and not introjection but its opposite, projection, which the works seemed to be thematizing. In Trockel’s art as in Ferenczi’s writings, the opposition of projection and introjection risks collapsing into identity. After its own fashion, Trockel’s art posits proximities and likenesses between our experiences before artworks and our experiences of paranoia, and of love.

Paranoia in particular appears to evoke the terms of Freud’s earliest elaboration of a psychoanalytic claim that “the purpose of paranoia is ... to fend off an idea that is incompatible with the ego, by projecting its substance into the external world.” Freud, and Ferenczi after him, insisted that projection must be recognized as “a psychical mechanism which is very commonly employed in normal life.” “Whenever an internal change occurs,” Freud writes, “we have the choice of assuming either an internal or an external cause. If something forces us away from the internal course of events, we naturally seize upon the external one.”³ As the paranoiac cannot tolerate the notion that certain of his own ideas might be the cause of his internal discomforts, he finds himself again and again “forced away from the internal course of events” and comes to “abuse” the psychic mechanism of projection “for the purposes of defense”—that is, for the expulsion into the external world of ideas unbearable to the ego in its internal world. This idea is not mine. It is—it must be—the idea of another, another who has come to know something about me that I do not know, something that I can see that I know I do not know, or did not know, or do not believe, because this is not my idea, it is an idea that came to me from outside. But how has another come to have this idea about me, to deliver

it to me, to know this thing about me? In an extraordinary formulation concerning the nature of human expression, Freud posits that “normal projection” is at work when “our internal states [are] betrayed (by an expression of emotion) to other people” and we in turn feel ourselves (and our expressions of emotion) observed by those people. In this sense, every expression of emotion involves a projection, which is to say a making visible of an internal change as an external change. According to Freud, the projection in question is normal “so long as, in the process, we remain conscious of our internal change”—that is, so long as our feeling of being observed by other people, and our sense of their having gained knowledge of our internal states, are both supported by our awareness of having made evident a change in our internal state of which we, too, possess conscious knowledge. “If,” however, “we forget [this internal change], we are left with only the leg of the syllogism that leads outwards; and there we have paranoia, with its overvaluation of what people know about us and of what people have done to us. What do people know about us that we know nothing about, that we cannot admit?”

Trockel’s *Paranoia*—a black-and-white photographic image of a young male model, cropped at the neck and covered by a Perspex sheet onto which a white Acrystal cast of part of an oxtail has been mounted at shoulder height—hangs on the wall as something like a monument to projection and its abuse. In *Paranoia*, the slender ease of the young man’s upper-body posture gives little away, while his face remains unavailable to betray anything at all of his internal state as an expression of emotion. Instead the mounted-on cast of meat makes its presence felt as if materializing a metaphor for the projection into the external world of the substance of an idea unwelcome within the internal world. But whose idea? Are we to imagine the apparently dispassionate young man in the photograph possessed by a paranoia made palpable in the sculptural cast? (“What do people know about us that we know nothing about, that we cannot admit?”) Or, does Trockel’s *Paranoia* ask us rather to envision the black-and-white image as a figure for the external world and the cast Acrystal flesh mounted upon it as a motif for the objectification of a projection immanent to the making of the work?

Interior Motive, a white Acrystal cast of what seems to be a rack of ribs mounted on Perspex flush to the wall, with a similar cast of some other cut of meat resting on another plane of the same Perspex surface and protruding at an angle of perhaps thirty degrees from the wall below, makes the case for seeing projection as a procedure inherent in the production of the artwork as such, a mechanism that makes possible the presentation of the casts as figures for flesh that has left its place inside the body and now appears outside in a not merely formless state. The bent Perspex support plays a crucial role in this. Affixing one cast to the wall while carrying the other forward from it, the Perspex support emerges as a device for the display of the bright white casts as objects situated between painting and sculpture and inclined to arouse imaginings of violence done to each.

A face is a face

Toward the beginning of Rainer Maria Rilke's novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), the eponymous narrator explains that he "is learning to see" and that it is not going well.⁴ He ruminates on "how many faces there are." There are many more faces than there are people, as every person has more than one face. Some wear the same face for years, until it gets worn out and dirty, cracking around its wrinkles and stretching out like gloves worn on a long journey. They keep their other faces in storage, planning to pass them on to their children. "But sometimes it also happens that their dogs go out wearing them. And why not? A face is a face." Others go through face after face in quick succession, wearing out their last when they are barely forty years old. They end up walking around with a face that's "thin as paper" and pierced with holes through which the "non-face" of its lining begins to show.

Once, recounts Malte, there was a woman on an otherwise deserted Paris street, a woman "completely fallen into herself, forward into her hands." The sound of his footsteps frightened her as he approached, and she "lifted herself up out of herself, too quickly, too forcefully, so that her face was left behind in her two hands ... I could see it lying there, its hollow form. It cost me an indescribable effort to stay with those two hands and not to look at what had torn itself out of them. It horrified me to see a face from the inside, but I was much more afraid of that bare flayed head without a face." A face, for Malte, is all but identical to a mask. Like a mask, it figures the fictions of personhood and the contingencies of embodied experience. Take care when removing a face.

In Trockel's *When Pinscher Becomes Form*, 2010, a dog sits up tall wearing a human face, while in more recent works casts of ready-made costume masks feature sometimes-frayed, sometimes-painted edges that display the traces of their removal from a mold as if to memorialize the violence of their separation from a face. In a work called *Clock Owner*, 2013, for example, the face happens to be Albert Einstein's, and the title perhaps alludes to the role of clock synchronization in his account of the conventionality of simultaneity in the special theory of relativity. In other recent pieces, masks mounted upright for in-the-round display turn their backs on beholders to reveal interior surfaces variously fleshed out, precasting, with folded and crumpled paper, and coated, postcasting, with acrylic paint; they work over, as a problem proper to sculpture, the horror of beholding masks that might as well be faces seen from the inside. (Trockel's early works often invoke Friedrich Nietzsche, and, like Rilke's writing, her art as a whole has hardly left him behind.)

Repulsion

A final association. Maybe it was Trockel's poster-like digital print *Canon Zero*, 2012, that put me in mind of Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965). In the film's vision of the deepening paranoid fantasies of a twentysomething Belgian manicurist (Catherine



figs. 2, 3: *Repulsion* (1965), directed by Roman Polanski.

Deneuve) in mid-1960s London, the skinned corpse of a rabbit set out on a platter and the suddenly animate walls of a Kensington apartment appear as motifs, or more precisely materializations, of projection. "Greetings," reads the creased black-and-white sheet from which Acrystal casts of meat appear to hang in Trockel's picture, obscuring parts of the undergarment-clad body of a blond woman who may be in the midst of undressing, her head thrown back and her just barely visible mouth partly open as if in a cry of passion. Though she's no Deneuve, the blond woman nevertheless evokes an era, and the conditions of her representation as a support for the sculptural casts of meat in the image give its offering of greetings a dimension of horror that reemerges in *Interior Motive*, formalized as at once motive and motif within the artwork's mode of presentation to the viewer.

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¹ J. P. Hebel, *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart and Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1818), 117–20.

² Sándor Ferenczi, "On the Definition of Introjection," in *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Michael Balint, trans. Erich Mosbacher (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 316–18.

³ This and the following quotations in the paragraph are from Sigmund Freud, "Draft H. Paranoia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Volume 1 (1886–1899): Pre-psycho-analytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 206–12 (translation modified).

⁴ The quotations in this and the following paragraph are from Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1985), 6 (translation modified).